

PRINCIPLES OF YOUTH WORK

BASED ON OBSERVATIONS IN MANY COUNTRIES



As presented by Dean A. L. Deering, University of Maine, to State 4-H Club leaders attending the National 4-H Club Camp, Washington, D.C., 1950

I. The Development of Principles

"Policy is a system of conduct shaped by expediency." - E. B. White

- A. Policies are needed to guide the day-to-day conduct of a program, but they in turn must be based on a fundamental and sound group of principles.
- B. Principles grow out of experience. If soundly drawn, they are relatively unchanging; but like policies, they grow, develop and change with deeper experience, and should be periodically examined to test their continuing applicability.
- C. Most youth organizations have clearly defined objectives, stated rules and regulations, programs, membership requirements, etc. None to my knowledge have set down in writing the principles on which they are based to assist and guide their professional and voluntary leaders and to inform the public.
- D. With the rapid growth of youth work throughout the world and with considerable experience today, it is appropriate that we should reexamine both our programs and the principles on which they are based.
- E. We appear to have a remodeling job to do in some instances. Our present structure was erected years ago, but modern trends and changing conditions indicate the necessity for adapting our building and procedures to meet today's need.

The following general principles are offered for what help they might be in this process. As we are primarily interested in the Extension youth program, they are intended to apply especially to youth organizations supported in whole or in part by public funds.

II. Projects and Programs

- A. The program of youth work should be based upon the wants and needs of the young people themselves.
 1. They should not be used to promote the hobbies of their leaders or unsound enterprises of any kind.
- B. Programs of youth work should be planned with youth (not for them.)
- C. The program of younger members should include individual project work under the guidance of their leaders. These jobs or tasks should be expected to meet certain requirements and standards. These projects should be associated with the work of the parent as in the home, or on the farm where mother and father can stimulate interest and activity and be stimulated in return.

- D. The program for older members should be built around the group for the common good of its members. The officers and committee members of the group can be charged with the development of the group's program.
- E. The program should provide out-of-school opportunities for work, recreation and voluntary learning.

III. Membership Requirements

- A. Membership should be entirely voluntary. Each should be permitted to join or not as he or she wishes, to withdraw, to do his work well or poorly, to attend meetings or not; no fees, no fines, no punishment.
- B. Membership should be open to anyone within the general requirements established for all, regardless of race, class, religion, or political beliefs.
- C. Membership regulations should be free from formal school requirements, examinations, study periods, discipline controls, etc.

IV. Leadership

- A. Leadership should be of two kinds, a few professional salaried people and many serving on a voluntary basis.
- B. Both types of leaders should possess inspirational qualities, wholesome habits and character, interest in and ability to guide, develop and encourage youth.
- C. Upon the shoulders of the professional leaders rests the responsibility of resisting domination by commercial interests and promotional schemes and to turn these efforts into rightful channels. (A complete set of principles may need to be set up in this connection to guard the objectives of youth work.)

V. Fundamental Principles

- A. Youth work should promote the growth of the individual for the success of the individual and the betterment of society and not as a slave to some ideology.
- B. Youth work should promote respect for the rights of others, the value of team work, fair play and how to win and how to lose.
- C. Youth work should be free from religious, political and military domination.
- D. As youth is a period of great activity and of learning, these two qualities should go hand in hand.

"Give every youth something physical to do and something mental to achieve that he may grow in wisdom and stature daily."